A Dream of Christmas

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A Dream of Christmas

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Set during Season 2, after Will's release from BSHCI. Hannibal is lonely on Christmas Eve, wishing he could spend the holidays with Will, but refusing to take the blame for damaging their friendship. That night, he dreams of the life he could have if he managed to make things right and be the man Will deserves. Can Hannibal make this dream come true?

Inspired by the premise of the Smallville episode "Lexmas."

One More Sleep

Hannibal's evening rituals were as meticulously designed as every other aspect of his life. He normally enjoyed the strict routine which was nonetheless based solely on his own preferences of how a night at home was best spent. In the kitchen, he neatly rolled up the sleeves of his immaculate white shirt to his elbows, pouring himself a glass of the light chianti which would pair exquisitely with this evening's menu. It seemed a pity there was no guest with whom to share his enthusiasm for the cuisine, no one to smile at and warmly converse with across the candlelit table, but why should that matter? In the past, Hannibal never particularly minded whether he had guests or reveled in solitary repose; both were enjoyable in their own ways. But not anymore, not since--

Do not let him ruin this night like so many others; keep him out of your mind.

He prepared himself a beautiful meal, involtini composed of his latest victim, the elegantly rolled bundles of meat and herbs accompanied by prosciutto and parmesan. The entree was presented over an indulgent scoop of polenta with perhaps a little more cheese blended into it than was altogether necessary. It was undeniably comfort food, even more so than his usual rich fare, this overdose of it a bad sign that he had begun to feel sorry for himself. But he ignored the evidence, tucking it neatly into his subconscious by eating it. If only it was as easy to expel all of his other troublesome thoughts on this hollow-feeling disappointment of a Christmas Eve.

As usual, he retired to the library after dinner, carrying a *third* glass of chianti (another unfortunate indication that he was unable to balance his thoughts and feelings without external assistance in calming down). He selected a dense Victorian novel from the shelf and settled in by the fire, reasoning that the combination of such cozy environs, a nice layering of alcohol from fine wine to comfortingly fuzz his mind, and an escape into an entirely different time and place via Charles Dickens' fascinating prose would prove sufficient distraction.

Half an hour later, he slammed the book shut in indignation, his cheeks flushed from more than the wine. He was utterly frustrated with himself for not being able to block out the one invasive concept which persisted in ruining his inner peace, and it had been this way for months. The little game he'd begun with a professional associate and sometime-patient had grown into a poisonous vine choking off his heart and making him bleed internally without being able to confess his agony to a soul, lest he also lose his almighty pride and dignity. Pride goeth before a fall, and Hannibal had no intentions of letting go of the very last protective vestige keeping him from complete ruination.

"'You have been the last dream of my soul,'" Sydney Carton told Lucie Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*. This was the sentence which had Hannibal so riled, as it ruthlessly lifted the latch on the floodgate in his feelings over the one he loved, making him wish he had a time machine to travel to the nineteenth century and strangle Dickens in a fit of righteous vengeance.

His routine was thoroughly tampered with, annoyingly thrown asunder by the unfeeling machinations of a fascinating, complicated, sweetly innocent but somehow (somehow!) entirely malevolent, unfairly stunning FBI consultant who, if he knew of Hannibal's ordeal, would probably respond with a smug smile and nothing but hatred in his eyes.

It was all a disaster, every single day. Wake up and shower, have his breakfast, think about Will Graham. Wonder if they could ever return to the full light of friendship, and if even that privilege could ever be enough to fend off the passionate firestorm in his soul for the profiler. Probably not, and probably not. See his patients, think about Will. Imagine the taste of Will's lovely, pale skin and the helplessly aroused sounds he would make if Hannibal covered him in kisses, marked him in possessive bites from head to toe. That is, if Will didn't despise him for framing him for murder (ridiculous, as if Hannibal had not made it abundantly clear that the framing was temporary, and he took no joy in bringing it about or watching his love languish behind bars!).

Even if he had not conspired for Will to be falsely accused, he supposed Will would still loathe him because of what he had done to Beverly Katz (an incident of pure self-defense for which he would muster no apology). And so, such an amorous encounter was highly unlikely outside of Hannibal's naggingly persistent fantasies.

Daily, the hunger pangs would persist, and no other creature comfort could sate him.

Neatly consume his lunch of delectable leftovers from the previous evening's dinner alone at his desk, scrolling through Tattlecrime, and think about Will. Wonder if he would have a chance to see Will before his next appointment, and what he could do to subtly manufacture such a fortuitous encounter. Imagine running his hands through silky curls, undoing the effects of Will's recent discovery of hair products, imagine having Will against the bookshelves, dismantling the other man's insistent restraint until Will forgot every other word except for Hannibal's name, forgot every other sensation except for Hannibal taking him over, body and soul, because nothing else mattered.

Drive home, tidy up the house, go to the opera, prepare dinner after flawlessly divine masterpiece dinner, fit in the occasional murder, sleep with Alana Bloom, think about Will, think about Will, think about Will.

Christmas was fast approaching, and it only made the entire conundrum more vastly infuriating, which, he silently fumed, should hardly be possible. He usually ignored the holiday almost entirely. After placing the intentionally vague decorative tree on the front hall table of his home, a bland acknowledgement of the occasion being all it really deserved, he normally put December 25th and all associated memories from his mind.

But for some reason, falling into obsessive love with Will Graham had made him unexpectedly weak for some of the typical hallmarks of Christmas which one could hardly avoid. The tinny sound of exuberant pop songs in every drug store, elevator or supermarket, heralding the season with promises of "going home to kiss under the mistletoe" with one's beloved and other such treacly drivel were beginning to get under his skin like tiny razors, whispering that he wished he could share a home with Will, catch the beautiful, shy boy under the mistletoe and kiss him senseless. The merry cards which people would insist on sending him despite his habitual disregard for the holiday merely continued the slow bleed of

irritating sentimentality. Look at all those happy families, all those images of domestic contentment, former patients and ex-co-workers cuddled up in matching pajamas with their brat children and mongrel pets as if Christmas was anything other than a rude, never-kept promise of happiness.

Hannibal thought that out of every instance of rude behavior which had ever caused him to lose his temper, Christmas was by far the most obnoxious of all, God's most shameless, deceptive guarantee of redemption.

As he usually did, Hannibal would spend the end of December alone, whether or not anyone else shared his dinner table or his bed, and now it mattered, now he *cared*, but Will did not. Last year, before all of the lies and gaslighting, before the covered-up case of encephalitis and the murder charges, Will *might* have reciprocated Hannibal's ardent devotion. But Hannibal had never felt a love like this before, and caught up in a maelstrom of confusion, intimidation and the instinct to protect himself from the inherent risks of sacrificing his individuality by bonding to such a lover, he had destroyed their fragile but precious friendship before the simmering attraction between them could ever fully surface.

He went upstairs and changed into his pajamas with a petulant scowl, cursing adorably rumpled, brown curly hair, blue eyes more radiant than a thousand brilliant stars, perfectly pouty, tempting lips and that sensuously sardonic voice. He cursed flannel shirts and terrible khaki pants, nicely ironed salmon dress shirts and newfound confidence, and everyone who had ever worked for Old Spice. For good measure, he cursed pale, soft skin and rosy cheeks, beguiling scruffy stubble, and of course, the world's most obnoxiously perfect ass.

If Hannibal allowed his sadness and anger to come to full fruition, he might begin to blame himself for the way events had transpired between himself and Will, which was an absurd possibility. Everything he had ever done involving Will was for Will's own good, and if his one-time friend refused to see the truth of that, it was hardly Hannibal's fault.

Christmas Eve. What a complete waste of his time and energy, to lose an entire evening which otherwise might have passed in pleasantly autonomous relaxation, to miserable heartbreak teetering over the edge of despair, all because of holly, ivy, babies in mangers, mistletoe madness, Father Christmas, Charles Dickens, lite rock radio hell, and Will Graham. It was only thanks to that third glass of wine that Hannibal fell asleep soon after adjourning to his bed, but if he thought he could escape this wretched thought tangent by dreaming, he could not have been more mistaken.

After all, Will Graham was the first dream of his soul, and would almost certainly be the last.

"Mmm," a familiar voice hummed, sluggishly still half asleep, as Hannibal roused in the morning and felt his heart stop in his chest at the sound.

A strong, warm arm wound around Hannibal where he lay on his side in bed, and that deliciously sly voice was back, rumbling against his ear along with a sexy scrape of stubble, "Last night was the best Christmas Eve *ever*."

Hannibal froze, completely sure he had gone mad, or else he must be having a terribly cruel dream which was probably about to end in disaster right before he woke up, cold and alone. It must be some combination of the two elements, because before he could bring himself to open his eyes, move or speak, a pair of bare, equally warm legs nestled up behind his own, spooning him, and two naked feet snuggled into his own as his bedfellow released a contented sigh, beginning to lay hot, slow kisses into the crook of Hannibal's neck.

"Think we can beat last night by making today even better?" Will smiled against his neck.

Hannibal was immobilized by the hot, wet sweep of Will's beautiful lips, his softly broad tongue, and the wicked little nips of his sharp teeth. This could not possibly be real. He clung instinctively to Will's forearm like a life preserver as hot tingles and a wave of perspiration took him over.

"C'mere," Will smirked, dragging Hannibal onto his back and straddling him, playfully pinning his hands to the mattress. Hannibal's heart hammered in his chest.

"Hmm," Will grinned, bucking his hips enticingly, feeling Hannibal's immediate erection press to his own hardness, "Is this my first Christmas present of the day?"

Will hovered above him with such a loving smile, his eyes soft and his hair a tousled heap of lovely curls. He wore only a white v-neck t-shirt and a pair of blue plaid boxer shorts, while Hannibal was clad in just his red silk pajama bottoms, his upper body bare and vulnerable to Will's nimble fingers, leaving his wrists to stroke through his silvery chest hair and lightly tug before he circled both of Hannibal's nipples, bringing them to hard peaks within seconds.

Hannibal's eyes went huge and he was aware he was panting like a dog in heat, but his hands automatically tightened on Will's hips, bringing their erections together as Will moaned and bucked into him again, creating a sweet slide of their clothed cocks.

"I'll take that as a yes, but you're uncharacteristically quiet this morning," Will observed, arching a brow as he leaned over Hannibal and placed a simple kiss on his lips, so casual as to be obviously habitual, as much as the morning seduction. "Are you okay?"

"I…" Hannibal stared in astonishment at Will, whose handsome face remained patiently positioned a breath away from his own, awaiting his reply.

In a desperate attempt to ascertain the nature of this scenario, Hannibal pinched Will hard on his bicep, unable to help himself getting even more aroused at the feel of the firm muscle between his fingers and the little yelp this provoked from Will.

"Oh, so it's going to be one of *those* mornings, huh?" Will's features shifted from mild concern to aroused mischief, and Hannibal frowned in confusion.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You want it rough," Will grinned, taking Hannibal's hands and placing them on his ass before kissing his mouth again, then licking the shape of his lips until Hannibal thought he

would faint from pleasure. “You know I’m always amenable to that. Come on, give it to me, daddy.”

What? Hannibal’s mouth sealed over Will’s in a heartbeat, a demanding, scorching kiss, the insatiable thrust of his tongue met in eager reciprocation by Will, who breathlessly rubbed himself against Hannibal’s engorged cock over and over, earning himself a series of hard, glorious spanks which only increased Will’s excitement.

If this was a dream, this was the most beautiful, unbelievably perfect dream Hannibal had ever had, and he was going to enjoy every last stolen moment of it.

Flipping Will over, he climbed astride him and continued his onslaught of wet, hungry kisses before plundering his neck with more of the same, biting, sucking and marking Will to his heart’s content as Will slipped down Hannibal’s pants and his own boxers in a considerable display of skill given that their bodies were tightly entangled. Will knew exactly how to shift his body at the right moment to divest them both of their scant attire, but even though this encounter seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary for him, he was just as thrilled as Hannibal.

Sliding his fingers under Will’s t-shirt, Hannibal relished every single inch of smooth skin he touched along the way before he flung the garment to the floor along with the rest of their pajamas.

“God, Hannibal, yes,” Will groaned, his eyes rolling back and mouth falling open as Hannibal kissed down his chest, then wrapped his big hand around Will’s throbbing dick with perhaps the largest, most genuine, sunny smile he had ever felt his face stretch into.

He had somehow ended up in paradise...was he dead, had someone poisoned his chianti, and had God decided to forgive his countless sins and gift him this magnificent version of an afterlife?

But before he could lower his lips to Will’s gorgeously glistening cock and begin the morning properly, the doorbell sounded from downstairs.

“Dammit!” Will complained, flinging his arm across his forehead. “You’d better go get that, you know they won’t leave the package on the steps. I blame you for this.”

“Why?” Hannibal asked teasingly, leaning up to kiss Will’s chin, his cheeks, the tip of his nose, before climbing off the bed and throwing his pants back on. “What did I do?”

In any universe where Will Graham wanted to share his bed, Hannibal assumed he must have behaved like a perfect angel from their first meeting. This must be a heavenly vision of a reality wherein Hannibal had treated Will properly from the start instead of fumbling their love into an impossibility.

“You’re the one who insisted on ordering those ridiculously overpriced napkins for the party tonight,” Will accused. “White festival linen with real gold embroidering from *Lithuania*, I mean come on, could you make our whereabouts any more obvious to the authorities? If you

don’t stop with the luxuries and the nostalgia, you’re going to bring Jack Crawford to our front door next, instead of the FedEx guy.”

Hannibal stood blinking as the doorbell rang a few more times, as if the delivery person was rudely jabbing at it, but he was too distracted to react to the uncouth behavior.

“And if I make our whereabouts obvious enough for Jack to catch on, then--”

“Then we’ll have to move again, and we’ve just gotten comfortable here.” Will pouted, and Hannibal had to fight the urge to climb back in bed and fuck him to within an inch of his life. The doorbell was still sounding, a relentless series of elegant chimes. “Finally, we find this endearingly quirky little village which all three of us equally approve, and you’re over here online shopping us into potential incarceration. Bad enough we had to board the dogs so they wouldn’t ruin your goddamn party aesthetic.”

Incarceration? In hiding from Jack Crawford? *All three of us?!*

Hannibal struggled to make sense of Will’s words, but he nodded as if it was all totally expected.

“The dogs would only have gotten into the food, you know they can never resist,” he smiled.

“Also your fault, for constantly feeding them scraps under the table,” Will countered adoringly.

Hannibal had had enough nice dreams in his life to know that the moment you started fully questioning the dream’s logic, you would wake up, and he never wanted to wake up from this. For the first time, he took a good look around their bedroom, finding it a combination of their two styles to the last degree, maroon and gold curtains and bed linens, austere antique decorations and richly sensual oil paintings complimented by untidy stacks of psychology, fishing, and dog care books on the bedside table, plus a bottle of cheap aftershave on the bureau which Hannibal just *knew* had been placed there to lovingly antagonize him. There were two bathrobes hanging from hooks on the back of the door, one midnight blue and satin, the other an appalling green and orange plaid flannel, looking as if it hailed from LL Bean, or worse. He let out an enamored, delighted sigh, feeling warm and comforted by every sight his eyes took in.

“I’ll wait here, horny and ready for you, daddy, but if you take too long, you know we won’t have the alone time. Get a move on, will you?” Will laughed, the sound husky and cute, making Hannibal’s poor, baffled heart skip a beat.

He clambered downstairs, lacking his usual grace of movement because his cheeks were aflame, his senses singing with Will, his mind insistently fighting back every instinct to look too closely at what was happening, lest he shatter this perfect illusion. They were in a large, but very cozy and rustic-looking country house, and a glance out the window revealed crystal blue skies and snow covering an expansive yard.

When he opened the door, he was confronted not by the delivery person, but by Abigail Hobbs, standing there in a hideously ugly Christmas sweater over black leggings, her long

hair, now blonde-highlighted, falling over her shoulders in lustrous waves.

“*Daaaad*,” she fussed, shoving a brown paper-wrapped package at him and stomping inside as if she owned the place. “Put some clothes on, for God’s sake. You knew I was coming, but you and Dad can’t keep your hands off each other for five freaking minutes, can you?”

“You’re early,” he managed to answer shakily.

He looked down at the package, which must contain those extravagant napkins (which, in fact, he had been thinking of purchasing; he applauded his dream self’s superb taste), then he followed Abigail, his mood hazily investigative and still more than half in shock.

Abigail strode to the kitchen with her suitcase on wheels trailing behind her, and paused on her way there to shout upstairs, “Dad, I’m hoooooommmeeee!”

“Okay, okay, okay,” Will groused back, amending himself a moment later with, "Welcome home, sweetie!"

“Seriously, anyone would think you two were the nineteen year olds, not me,” Abigail chuckled fondly, as if she was actually rather happy that her parents were still so in love despite what she probably considered their near geriatric age brackets. She opened the fridge and stuck her head inside, looking over the array of food and musing, “I’m starving…”

“Any of that obnoxious vicar left in here?” she asked as Hannibal continued staring at her in disbelief, seizing upon every precious detail of their life which she unwittingly revealed.

In real life, Abigail was still hidden away, unbeknownst to Will, the girl lonely and resigned to wait until Hannibal thought they could escape their life in Baltimore, and he had not seen her display such unfiltered happiness in the entire time he had known her. He wanted this so much, to see her beaming and resplendent in embracing her true nature, to joyfully forgive her the occasional rudeness because she was their daughter, his and Will's, and they were a family.

“Oh, goody!” She pulled out a plastic wrap-covered plate of what looked like veal cutlets and was almost assuredly *not*. “It’s sandwich time! You want some? You do realize it’s noon, right? You two stay up late last night?”

Her innocently blithe chatter rolled over him like another cascading dose of pure joy. He nodded, stepping forward to cup her cheek and inspect her just a little more, not wanting to upend the dream, but too curious to resist. A quick look at the side of her head beneath the silky flow of her long hair revealed that she only had one ear.

This dream was not set in the past, then. It was apparently...his Christmas future, in some artificial world where happy endings existed?

“I’m just so glad you’re home,” Hannibal smiled warmly. “You help yourself to the vicar, and I’ll go and get dressed.”

“You do that, Romeo,” Abigail smirked, taking out two slices of bakery bread and starting to slather them in whole-grain spicy mustard.

Hannibal felt so happy he was dizzy, and as he nearly pranced with glee, making his way to the stairs to go and find Will again, he heard a faint, haunting tinkle of piano keys sounding from the next room. When he wandered in that direction, he found the place to be a library, generous in size but somehow entirely intimate in feeling, just like the rest of this house. There was a lovely, plush-looking window-seat overlooking a garden doused in powdery snow that glittered in the early afternoon sunlight. And beside the window-seat, on the opposite wall from the impressive bookcase which looked in danger of overflowing from the enthusiastic cram of so many volumes, there sat a young girl at the piano. She was perhaps seven but somehow possessed an elegant, even intellectual bearing which belied her age. Her ash-blonde hair, the color so like his own when he was a child, was arranged in two pretty braids, and she wore her favorite blue party dress. She was luminous, exuding a bright white energy which made her resemble the Ghost of Christmas Past.

Her small, deft fingers traveled over the keys, continuing a medley of Christmas songs which had just progressed from “Away in a Manger” to “O Holy Night.” She smiled when she looked up and saw him standing there, once again entirely aghast at where this dream had led him.

“Hello, Hannibal,” the girl greeted, cheerfully cordial. A little formal, even with him, as she always had been. “Merry Christmas.”

He stared at her, unable to believe his eyes. “*Mischa*?”

In my heart there's a Christmas tree farm

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What...what is this place?” Hannibal asked, drawing closer as Mischa withdrew her hands from the piano and looked up at him with a sweet smile. “How can you possibly be here? Am I dreaming?”

“Yes, it is a dream,” his sister affirmed, “But more than a dream. It is my Christmas gift to you, Hannibal. A vision of what might be, the future you can still have, if you make the right choices when you waken. I have been watching you these many years since I left the mortal world, brother.”

She spoke in Lithuanian, and the sound of the nostalgic language couched in her much-loved and missed voice was even more beautiful than the flawless melody she had been playing.

“The course of my life has not been suitable for a child’s eyes,” Hannibal gulped, “It has been a dark and bloodied road, and there is still no end in sight.”

“I wonder if either one of us was ever really a child,” she murmured, resting her fingers over his. She was as cold as ice, but he did not withdraw. “I have seen much sadness in your life, Hannibal. That is why I want you to pay close attention to all that you will see in this night’s vision. Consider it your golden opportunity.”

“I don’t believe in those,” he insisted, “Or in Christmas miracles. I certainly don’t believe you are anything more than a product of my unconscious imaginings, much like the rest of this preposterous scenario.”

“Perhaps it is time you start believing. If there ever was such a time, I believe it is Christmas, don’t you?” She tilted her head to the side, contemplating his stern expression, the floodgates carefully locked again. “You love Will Graham. You love him with all your heart and soul, yet you have been driven by petty games, whims of childish jealousy and vengeance, anything you could conjure to avoid addressing your true wishes. It is little wonder you have pushed him so far away from you.”

“These are bold accusations,” Hannibal bristled, but she clucked her tongue reprovingly.

“Are they, though? Are they really, brother? Do you deny that you want a life with Will Graham, and to have Abigail Hobbs as your daughter?”

“It’s impossible,” he sniffed, running his fingers over the books on the long shelf, simply to have something to do to avoid Mischa’s incisive cinnamon-hued gaze. “Why should I let myself pine for the love of a man who regards me as nothing more than an evil psychopath, and his worst enemy?”

“You have allowed Will to go on believing Abigail is dead,” Mischa remarked, her voice soft and sure as the delicate ring of a bell. “Why?”

“Should Will prove himself worthy of my trust, should I find a way to regain his friendship, *then* I will tell him about Abigail. However, I think it highly unlikely he would ever consent to see me as a romantic prospect. He’s never given me the slightest hint he reciprocates my feelings in that way.”

“Have you *let* him give you the slightest hint, brother, or have you been a little too busy manipulating him and carrying on your own selfish machinations to notice?”

“Selfish? That is absurd; everything I have ever done for Will has been with his best interest at hear--”

“Absurd?” Mischa repeated, more sharply, although her eyes were mournful, perhaps for the soul of the young boy he had once been, whom she remembered so fondly, and who was currently tamped down by Hannibal’s refusal to be vulnerable. “Everything you have ever done for Will has been with your own convenience in mind. If a friend ever violated your trust and used you as thoroughly as you have Will Graham, you would eat them on the spot. Yet you expect him to wish to resume your friendship, when you still refuse to take ownership of your terrible past decisions.”

“Terrible?” he repeated, a small twitch in his jaw and an extra flash of stiffness to his posture indicating he was highly offended. “I don’t remember you being so judgemental when we were children, Mischa.”

“You need to be judged by someone who still has the capacity to forgive you, who still believes there is a vivid beauty in your soul that makes you worthy of love and redemption. I am not the only one capable of rendering such judgement, brother, but there is only one living who can bestow it.”

“Will,” he said gruffly, nodding and clasping his hands behind his back, his perfectly elegant bearing rather humorous now that he was clad in pajama pants and barefoot, rather than boasting a three piece suit. “I’ve told you it’s impossible. The only way I can regain Will’s regard is to draw on our connections to each others’ darkness.”

“More manipulation,” she sighed. “You would try and tempt him down that path without confessing your feelings, without telling him you are sorry about your past mistakes--”

“I’m not sorry. I have nothing for which I ought to feel the slightest itch of guilt,” he insisted haughtily, striking his finger down the piano lid as if checking for dust.

“You cannot lie to me, Hannibal.” Her smile was kind but very sad. “You never could.”

“Hannibal?” Will’s voice called as the steady padding of socked feet coming down the stairs announced he would soon round the corner to the library.

Hannibal turned away from Mischa for a moment, looking to the doorway as Will appeared, wearing a Christmas sweater that was actually, impossibly, even more hideous than Abigail’s.

There were sparkly reindeer, candy canes, and snowflakes all over the garish red canvas of hand-knitted horror. Yet in combination with Will's glowing smile and that pair of snug-fitting blue jeans he wore, it was surprisingly bearable.

"I know, I know, it's *horrific*," Will admitted, pointing at his sweater. "But Abby made these herself and we promised-- hey, you don't think you're actually getting away with not wearing yours, too, right?"

Hannibal blinked at Will in yet more befuddlement before returning his gaze to the piano bench to find it vacant.

"Will, have you seen a little blonde girl using the piano in here of late?"

"Seriously, what is *up* with you today?" Will squinted, approaching Hannibal and cupping his face in those delightfully calloused hands. "You know there's just been you and me at home for months, since Abby's been away at college."

"Ah, yes," Hannibal nodded shakily, undone by the bright haven of Will's blazing blue eyes, "Of course."

"And listen, you know if it was up to me, I'd love for you to stay dressed like *this* all day long," Will muttered, looking around quickly to make sure Abigail was nowhere in sight. The sound of her absent-minded caroling and plates moving around in the kitchen affirmed she was still in there, so Will grinned and grabbed both of Hannibal's ass cheeks with a merry squeeze. "You look *perfect*."

Hannibal stood there staring at him with his mouth hanging open, so Will laughed, ruffling his silver-blonde hair. "I love you with bedhead, daddy, maybe most of all."

"Will, when...when did you begin calling me that?" Hannibal couldn't resist the question.

"Come on, you remember that," Will blushed adorably. "It was when we first moved here, and there was that night...you know, when you were making that insanely succulent French fish stew, what's it called?"

"Ah, a bouillabaisse," Hannibal suggested.

"Yeah, I think that's the one. Well, Abigail was excited to eat and kept asking, 'when's it gonna be ready'; we were all so hungry after being out fishing at the stream all day, and so I went into the kitchen and asked you, went back to Abby and said, 'Daddy said it's only going to be a few more minutes.' Well, then, I turned red from head to toe and this weird shiver went through me, and I looked back at you and our eyes met, and we both knew."

"When did you call me that next?"

"In bed that night," Will whispered, pressing a feathery kiss to Hannibal's jaw, running his hands up and down Hannibal's bare torso, leaving quivers in his wake. "Softly, over and over. Begging. To see how you liked it."

“I loved it,” Hannibal confirmed, as if he truly had been there. He could almost imagine it, especially now, with the taste of Will’s warm lips pressing a bit more firmly to his own, and with Mischa’s words still ringing in his mind, the suggestion that this could ever be more than a dream…that he could ever deserve…

A strange, sudden, discomforting notion, that. He hadn’t realized he thought he did not deserve Will.

“Let’s not get carried away yet,” Will winked, “Save some of that stamina for after the party, because I’ll be saving mine up for you. Now, go get ready so we can head out to get the tree.”

“The tree, of course!” Hannibal nodded, kissing Will’s cheek before striding upstairs and happily slipping on a pair of grey trousers and the sweater Abigail had knitted for him. The sweater featured a vile assortment of dancing elves, but it was warm and his daughter had made it just for him. He would wear it with pride.

It was a short drive through the adorable English village with its cobblestone streets and charming boutiques interspersed with pubs, before they arrived at Henry’s Christmas Tree Farm. The cold air puffed agreeably from Hannibal’s lips as he exited the little blue car that looked just like every other car in the lot, only the shades of primary colors varying. They seemed to blend right in with their heavy winter coats, hats and gloves, and several villagers stopped to greet the trio cheerfully.

“Dr. Ottesen, how lovely to see you here,” said a slightly hunched-over elderly woman accompanied by her twenty-something grandchildren, who similarly beamed at Hannibal, Will, and Abigail. “You remember my darling Jamie and Eliza, of course,” she added, placing a withered hand on each of her grandchildren’s shoulders. Jamie, a handsome lad with a sandy dappling of freckles on his skin and a mop of vibrant auburn hair sticking out from his wool hat, allowed his gaze to settle too long on Abigail for Hannibal’s liking.

“Yes, of course,” he said tersely, taking his apparent alias of “Dr. Ottesen” in stride, far more concerned with other matters at present. Abigail was batting her eyelashes at Jamie, who blushed in response.

“Maisie, you’re looking radiant as always,” Will said smoothly, taking Hannibal’s hand and giving it a reproving squeeze. “Johan tells me your arthritis has been acting up lately; I hope it’s not bothering you too much today.”

Hannibal noticed Will taking on the role of eloquent people-pleaser which he himself usually filled, probably out of necessity since Hannibal had gone silent, glaring at Jamie until the young man gulped and withdrew his eager eyes from Abigail’s brightly welcoming face. Hannibal was distracted, however, by the enticing sight of how easy it was for Will to put on a debonair persona, what a slick and delightful conman his love truly was, just as Hannibal had always suspected.

"Oh, not too bad today at all, dearie, thanks for asking," Maisie smiled at Will. "Your dashing boyfriend here has given me such excellent care that I'm feeling much better now."

“Can I show you the tree we’re getting, Mandy?” Jamie asked Abigail, who gave Will a beseeching look, nervously avoiding Hannibal’s eyes.

“Of course, you two run along and have a look,” Maisie cackled, pleased to see her grandson so besotted with the pretty American student. “Young love, isn’t it so sweet?”

“Let’s go and get some hot apple cider, Grammy,” Eliza suggested, guiding Maisie into the little red cottage nearby which served as a gift shop and bakery.

“I think we should do the same, don’t you, *Johan*,” Will smirked, almost having to wrench Hannibal’s feet from the snowy ground as he stared daggers at Jamie, who was innocently pointing to a tall, finely composed tree as Abigail clasped her hands together in glee.

“If we must,” Hannibal agreed reluctantly, unable to use Will’s alias to snark back with, since he had no idea what it was.

They wandered inside the small shop to find it brimming with the irresistible scents of cinnamon, nutmeg, chocolate and pine. The place was quaintly shabby chic and crammed with every type of ornament that would fit on turnstile racks, leaving just enough room for customers to browse and help themselves to the free cider and cocoa.

“We should pick ours out while Abby’s outside, and surprise her when she comes in,” Will suggested, transparently determined to turn Hannibal’s frown upside down.

“Pick what?” Hannibal asked, gloomily looking around at the happy shoppers, trying his best to resist the Christmassy atmosphere of the place.

How dare that young interloper look at his daughter with such obvious desire? After all, college-aged boys were not to be trusted, and Abigail deserved only the very best. Even in his previous fantasies of their domestic life together, he had assumed Abigail would not date until she had graduated from college, because she would be too busy for such superficial concerns, what with her education at school and at home. But would piano lessons, hunting, fishing and cooking really have been enough, would the life the three of them maintained so contentedly have lasted so long? Well, obviously not.

“Our tradition of each picking out a new ornament for our Christmas tree,” Will clarified, rolling his eyes. “Jeez, you really are distracted. C’mon, grumpy, do you want cider or hot chocolate?”

“Cider,” he requested, taking a tentative, rather condescending sip once Will handed him a cup of the steaming drink. “Humph, not bad.”

“Of course it’s not bad, you always say it’s the best apple cider you’ve ever tasted.” Will sipped his cocoa and sighed. “Really, you’ve got to get used to the idea that Abby is going to be dating. She couldn’t stay our little girl forever, Hannibal; she wasn’t a child anymore when she became ours. And she’s been driving herself crazy lately, trying to get up the nerve to broach the subject of Jamie with you.”

“I suppose I noticed her trying to get my attention,” Hannibal recalled, thinking of her overly coarse manner when she arrived at the house earlier, which seemed like a cry for his notice. “But do not act as if you find this ‘Jamie’ person remotely trustworthy.”

“I think he seems like a nice guy,” Will shrugged, adjusting his glasses as he casually surveyed a rack filled with myriad snow-people ornaments.

“When we first met, you thought *I* was a nice guy,” Hannibal argued sternly.

“Oh, seriously, will you give the two of them a break? If you give Abby your blessing for her to date Jamie, it will be the best Christmas gift you could possibly offer. I know it will make her whole holiday.” Will pouted, and Hannibal immediately put a finger up in forboding.

“Don’t you dare, Will,” Hannibal insisted, “Especially not in public.”

Will gave his most hauntingly cherubic smile, turning his enormous, glistening puppy dog eyes on his lover as his voice caressed the single syllable with the sexiest, most intoxicating succour: “Please.”

Hannibal scowled, but only because he was fighting the sudden urge to break into laughter, as Will’s own attempt to hold back giggles failed pathetically.

“I’ll consider it,” Hannibal allowed as Will clutched his belly, dissolving into helpless laughs. “But that was a very dirty ploy.”

“I hope there’ll be consequences,” Will winked, leaning in to brush a kiss to Hannibal’s lips. Their mouths were warm from the drinks, but the rest of their exposed skin was still cold, making the kiss even more delicious, mixed with sugar, spice and heat.

Hannibal shivered and let out a blissful sigh. “How did we ever get here, Will? Why would you want to come away with me?”

“You’re asking *me*?” Will quirked a brow, moving on to a rack of blown-glass ornaments that shimmered in the light misting in through the window behind them. Shining embellishments of poinsettias, elves, and candy canes bounced lightly under Will’s carefully examining touch, grazing them one by one as the sight of his handsome face and that strong, lightly bearded jawline made Hannibal’s heart turn somersaults.

“Honey, you’re the one who planned our escape and cajoled me into it,” Will reminded him. “I mean, I think the cincher was that you finally, God! *Finally* decided to be completely open and honest with me, but I was already head over heels in love with you. All you ever really had to do was ask. *And* say you were sorry for all the ways you hurt me, and others, trying to convince yourself this wasn't what you wanted.”

“That’s...that’s all it took?” Hannibal wondered, his mouth running dry at the thought. After all his ceaseless maneuverings and shadow games, he could really just…*have* Will, simply by telling the truth and announcing his desire that it be so? “But what about my more unconventional proclivities?”

“Yeah, well, we compromised, you know that.” Will finished his cocoa and collected Hannibal’s empty cup as well, depositing them in the trash as they passed it on their way to admire a collection of porcelain Christmas village houses in Dickensian style.

Dickens...that reminded Hannibal of something important...but he didn’t want to dwell too long on reality, lest he awaken himself from this dream too soon, or quite frankly ever. What could reality possibly have to offer him, compared to this utter perfection, compared to having a family here with the two people he loved most, a second chance to enjoy life to the fullest and live it hand in hand with Will?

“I don’t kill as often,” Hannibal guessed as Will nodded, only half-paying attention to him, still browsing the store. “And...do you ever join me, does Abigail?”

“Sure, when you deign to let us know your plans,” Will said a little more sharply. “We had words over the vicar, all too recently. Don’t pretend you’ve forgotten it already. You’re drawing unnecessary attention to us. I don’t especially feel like uprooting our lives again or going in for another terrible dye job and fashion makeover. We need to be more careful.”

“The vicar’s attitude was intolerable,” Hannibal assumed as he happened to notice an ornament that made him think of Will. A soft smile took over his face as he lifted the delicate porcelain figure of a peaceful fisherman. “I think I’ve found my ornament.”

“Awww, honey,” Will grinned, his irritation vanishing just that easily. “I found mine, too.” He held up a ceramic snowman dressed in an apron which said “Kiss the Chef.”

“A perfect likeness,” Hannibal chortled.

“I realize the vicar was a pushy, bigoted asshole, Hannibal,” Will murmured, leaning in for a kiss. “But next time don’t try to sell me some sob story about how someone ‘fell down the stairs’ accidentally.”

“Perhaps he had a little help,” Hannibal smirked, kissing Will with sweetly suggestive caresses of his lips, teasing out what awaited them when they could be alone again. “But I’ll be more careful in future.”

“You do that, daddy,” Will advised with a mischievous sparkle in his eyes. “Oh, look, they’re back.”

“Dads!” Abigail announced, not letting go of Jamie’s hand because Hannibal had shot her an approving nod and a soothing smile. He supposed he could try and tolerate the boy, for her sake and Will’s, but only as long as Jamie behaved to the strictest standard.

“We found the perfect tree for our house! If we hurry, we can have it all decorated before the guests arrive for the party tonight.” Abigail’s face was aglow, full of Christmas spirit and a renewed sense of trust and peace in her bond with Hannibal, since he wasn’t acting like the overbearing, micromanaging, judgemental father disapproving her boyfriend without giving him a chance.

If it wasn't for Will's patiently wise advice, Hannibal would have flown off the handle and pushed Abigail away. He marveled at how indispensable Will had become to his sense of comfort and joy, and drew his lover near again once he had given Abigail permission to have the farm workers cut down the tree of her choosing and load it onto the roof of their car.

"I still cannot quite understand what you are doing here with me," Hannibal admitted, clutching Will's hand with a needy heat that caught his attention.

"Really, are you okay? I feel like you're having a Christmas existential crisis over here. You know I adore you." Will smiled, kissing his blushing cheek. "I think you're extraordinary, brilliant, sexy, capable of understanding me and loving me on this deeper level I didn't even know existed before we met. And you're so much of all that, I've gotten into the habit of forgiving your admittedly wild set of foibles. You put up with me and my social awkwardness and dog obsessions, after all, but much more than that, Hannibal, you found me. People used to look at me and see either a tool to solve a crime, or an annoying mess in their way. But to you, I'm…"

"Special," Hannibal acknowledged, velvety warmth thickening his accent as his heart filled to bursting. "Irreplaceable and incomparable. There is no one like you, Will, and you see me, too. You found me when I was hiding in my insufferable pride, refusing to believe a love like this could be real."

"And now we share one memory palace," Will grinned. "So let's keep going. There's lots more rooms to build."

The party went off splendidly, with every lavish dish which Hannibal's dream self had exhaustedly planned ahead of time executed to the most exquisite degree. Guests mingled in cozy, quiet contentment, chatting of the holidays and their plans, their hopes for the new year with their families. And Hannibal did not have to listen to such conversations in miserable, Scrooge-like resentment anymore, because now he had a family, too, once again after all these years and against his every expectation of living out a life in deepest solitude. Now he could even enjoy the neighbors' harmlessly pedestrian chatter, dodging an amusedly warning glance from Will whenever someone mentioned the dreadful vicar's mysterious disappearance. Most everyone seemed to assume the fellow had gone off on some eccentric lark and abandoned the fold, and they were grateful for his departure.

The sitting room was resplendently decorated with tinsel covered in fairy lights, the new tree standing majestic at the center of the festivities, with the new ornaments arranged right in front, including Abigail's wistful choice of a glittery pink heart.

She stood hand in hand with Jamie, resting her head on the tall boy's shoulder as they gazed out the window at the fluffy snowflakes still drifting lazily by. Hannibal noticed the way the snow had fallen like that since he had "awoken" or entered the dream this "morning," and knew that only in a fantasy could snow be quite so flawless in its picturesque descent. Nonetheless, he did not miss his real life one bit, and only wished he knew the trick that would make this dream permanent.

But he was interrupted in the process of pouring another glass of merlot for the baker and her wife when the sound of piano keys being gently coaxed into “Silent Night” drew his attention to the library. He had a heavy-hearted sense of inevitable conclusion as he excused himself and quietly made his way to the source of the music. Yet he could not stay away when he knew there was a chance to see his sister again.

“Brother,” she smiled, “What a wonderful party. Have you enjoyed your time here?”

“Immensely. Tell me, Mischa, is there any chance I might simply remain right here? I do not want to go back. I doubt I could actually bear to go back, after having lived like this even for one day.” Tears sprang to his eyes and she gave him a sympathetic smile.

“It is precisely because you now understand the precious value of this life that you *must* return, Hannibal, and make your Christmas amends. Your Will is waiting for you, just as he always has been, and surely by now you see it is the perfect time for change.”

“If you say it is possible, I shall have to believe you, for in your own way you were always much wiser than me,” he admitted with a husky laugh, falling to his knees before her and taking her little hands. She was impossibly soft to the touch, as if she would vanish if he were to squeeze, or if he examined her too closely. Her icily regal magic flowed from the white glow she exuded, but the cold was not bitter, instead sending currents of gentle affection to his sore, formerly cynical heart.

“How can I ever thank you for this vision, Mischa?” He asked, bowing his head, rendered humble by her beneficence. “I could not save you, and yet even from beyond this life you have found a way to try and save me.”

“You were an excellent brother, Hannibal,” she assured him, that tiny lisp running through her voice again to remind him she was still, forever, so young and sweet, the way he remembered her. Far too young to have been ruthlessly snatched from the seemingly charmed life they shared. “Nothing that happened to me was your fault, and you could have done nothing to change my fate.”

“Mischa,” he sighed, beginning to cry as she planted a tender kiss on his head.

“It’s alright now, brother. Wake up, and remember all you have seen.”

“I don’t want to wake up,” he insisted, squeezing his eyes shut, nuzzling closer to her as if this could prevent it. “I want to stay here with you, with my family.”

“We’ll always be with you,” Mischa assured him as the world began to softly disintegrate before his eyes. “All you need do is believe it.”

The next thing he knew, the English country home was gone, along with the piano and his sister’s whisper of an embrace. He was alone in his fussy, overly heavy bedclothes at his house in Baltimore.

Yanking the alarm clock closer, he noted that it was exactly twelve midnight. It was Christmas day.

He leapt from the bed, hurrying to get ready, for he had so much to do, and there was not a moment to lose.

Chapter End Notes

The title for this chapter comes from the Taylor Swift song "Christmas Tree Farm", and the chapter one title comes from the Leona Lewis song "One More Sleep." Thanks for reading, hope you're enjoying the story! <3

Time for Change

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The front steps creaked as Hannibal ascended them, trying to approach Will's door with the utmost quiet composure, but the groan of the old wood could just have easily have come from the overwrought mess inside his chest, which he had once called a heart.

Will was slumped drowsily against the doorframe before Hannibal could run through the list in his mind one more time, as he had planned to. He had carefully decided everything he needed to say to Will, but he was still frantically deliberating over the correct order in which to proceed.

I love you.

I've always loved you.

Come away with me, and we'll begin again, make our own incomparable life together.

Abigail is alive, she will be with us.

I'm sorry.

"If you're here to kill me, I guess have at it," Will grumbled, rubbing the heel of his hand into his eye. He wore only his white v-necked t-shirt and a pair of grey boxer briefs, his bare toes curling to the bump of the floor in the doorway.

Even in the winter, Will was so given to perspiring during slumber that he could wear nothing heavier. Hannibal gleaned as much from the thin layer of dampness all over Will's skin and mottling his shirtfront over his heart, the moisture clinging to the lines of his beautiful chest. Will's face was drawn with sleeplessness, suggesting he only conquered his waking state to stumble into traumatic dreams which forced him awake again, alone with no one to hold and console him, to tell him his dark visions were a premonition of his future glory, and not to fear that anymore.

The thought was unbearable, that Will should suffer alone, as both of them must when they were apart. No one else would understand what either of them endured, or the dizzying heights of majesty to which they could ascend together.

"I'm too tired to fight you off right now. Dammit, it's Christmas. Don't you bloodthirsty, evil fiends at least take one day a year off?" Will ran a hand through his ruffled curls and squinted at Hannibal's nervous expression. "Are you going to say something, or are you just going to stand there gawking at me while you look like you're on your way to your own funeral? I can almost see emotion; I think one corner of your mouth just twitched."

"I am not here to kill you, Will," Hannibal began haltingly.

One wouldn't ordinarily assume that a person's cuteness could render another speechless, nearly limbless with heartbreaking adoration, but there one would be wrong. Will was so distractingly cute, so reluctantly and irretrievably sweet with his quirks and twitches, his barbed acerbic quips. How could anyone resist this gorgeous, brilliant boy? Hannibal considered his past self an unforgivable fool, now that the dream had opened his eyes.

"I've tried to arrive at some conclusion as to where I should begin," he elaborated, watching Will start to wake up a bit more as those blue eyes dragged discerningly over his unusually casual and relaxed attire.

Wanting to set Will at ease, wanting to let Will see him at his most open, he had dressed in beige trousers and a soft red sweater, befitting the holidays and defying his usual tightly confining layers of suiting. No three piece bespoke fabric to disguise him, no person suit to hold him back from every confession he must make.

Will's tongue darted out, circling his plush lips as he finished his visual appraisal by noting Hannibal's unstyled hair falling against his brow, his caramel eyes wet and wide in the shadows of the frigid night. Finally, Will shivered.

"Guess you may as well begin at the beginning," he nodded, ambling back inside as Hannibal followed. The dogs rushed past them in delight at the unexpected nocturnal frolic, kicking up snow as they darted into the yard.

Will grabbed his glasses from the small table by his bed, then headed for the kitchen, not bothering to get dressed. He yawned and scratched under his arm, then across his ribs, and Hannibal couldn't tear his eyes from Will's every sleepy little gesture...cute, cute, cute, he was so intolerably adorable...and sexy...Hannibal took pause at the closer look he now got at Will's stunning physique, his tight briefs leaving little to the imagination *and* leaving his lovely legs bare.

"So," Will yawned, slapping a filter into the coffee pot, then scooping some grounds in. "What's your latest little ploy, and why do you feel the need to unfurl it on this holy night of all times?"

An amused lilt of sarcasm accompanied his reference to the occasion, and Hannibal took the opportunity to look around the dim house. Just Will's usual spartan environs, not a hint of festivity to be found.

"You haven't put out any Christmas decorations," Hannibal noted with interest.

"No, I guess you could say I lost the spirit. Not that I ever had much of it to begin with. My dad wasn't exactly big on the holidays, and I can't remember the last time I had an actual Christmas tree-- God, why are you so uncannily good at getting me off-topic? Out with it, Doctor, why are you paying me a housecall?"

"Why did you let me in?" Hannibal asked casually.

Will's soothingly predictable manner and the way he relaxed for Hannibal without meaning to made Hannibal relax in turn. He went to the cabinet and took out two mugs, smiling at the

faded logos. One said, "*I work hard so my dogs can live the dream,"* and the other, "*I'd rather be fishing.*"

With a soft smile, Hannibal pondered the fact that Will would never buy himself such items, so they must have come from his friends at work, like Crawford, Zeller, Price...Beverly...a shadow fell across his hopeful heart. Or Alana. Alana, whom Hannibal had seduced not only to have a witness whilst he dealt with Abel Gideon, but also to make Will jealous. In a spiteful fit of jealousy over what he angrily considered Will's naive schoolboy crush on Alana and his hatred towards Hannibal, he had felt it a worthy act of retribution. Now he recognized that affair as just one more way he had isolated his beloved soulmate, all for the kind of coldly comforting, insubstantial vengeance that left Hannibal feeling lonelier than ever.

"Don't I always let you in?" Will murmured as the coffee pot began to percolate, jagged little unsure starts and stops from a machine past its prime.

Perhaps it was too late for the two of them as well, but Hannibal could not give up so easily. He remembered what Mischa had taught him and gathered his courage, using it to smother his pride and sense of self-preservation as best he could.

"I'm grateful. It's more than I deserve, after all I have done."

Will stroked his jaw with a short, harsh laugh. "Gee, you think?"

"Yes," Hannibal admitted, his voice husky with powerful yearning as he slowly crossed the room, needing to be face to face for this. "I've been deliberating over what I ought to tell you first. I have so many truths to impart to you, and tonight every one of them has wrenched open my heart trying to get to you, where they belong."

"*What*," Will snapped, discomforted by Hannibal's proximity, the heat of his body coming in natural wafts building off the chemistry between them, easily felt through Hannibal's sweater and snow-speckled overcoat. "What do you want to tell me, Dr. Lecter?"

The firm way Will emphasized his formal title cut to the quick, as he clearly meant it to indicate he wanted to keep Hannibal at an icy distance, but an inevitably erotic undertone had always crept into the syllables when Will used them. Perhaps it was the way his southern accent resurfaced to nestle affectionately into the phrase, "Doc-tah Lect-ah" or a fiery burst of something unspeakable beneath Will's gaze, but at any rate his choice of words only served to tighten the tension between them like a cocked gun.

Hannibal placed one large hand on Will's cheek, caressing his thumb over Will's face as his beloved nemesis seemed to go instantly weak at the touch, tears gathering in those lost blue eyes.

"Will," he whispered, "Abigail is alive."

"What?" Will gasped, shoving Hannibal back, "Where? Why didn't you tell me? Where?" He advanced on Hannibal and yanked him by his shirt collar, glaring at him with his resentment in full force, contained only by his need to find Abigail. "Tell me where she is!"

“I’ll take you there,” he offered, so meekly that even in Will’s shock, he registered a secondary jolt of surprise at Hannibal’s behavior.

“No,” he insisted, pushing Hannibal again, more roughly, until Hannibal’s back caught the edge of the counter. His hair fell across one eye and his breath caught in his throat, excitement battling the continuous agony of his uncertainty: when this was all over, would Will be his, or lost to him forever? “Give me the address,” Will commanded.

Hannibal lifted his hand. “Your phone?”

He took Will’s phone and entered Abigail’s whereabouts into the GPS. She was safely tucked away in one of several extra houses he kept in the area, so nearby as to make it especially audacious to keep the missing, presumed dead girl there. He had taken a pleasant little self-congratulatory boost of amusement at his own cleverness throughout the entire proceeding, but the pale, panicked look on Will’s face tore away his smugness.

Without another word, Will threw jeans, a sweater, socks and boots on, yanking his coat so fiercely from the hook on the back of the door that the hook came free and landed on the floor with a loud metallic clank.

Hannibal felt he had been designated so much useless, forgettable trash by the way Will left without bothering to speak another word or letting him come along. Will slammed the door of his car and the tires squealed as he set off to save his surrogate daughter from the belly of the beast.

It was fully morning by the time Will returned, and Hannibal had long since finished his third cup of coffee, along with the better part of a Kate Chopin novella. He sat in the cozily broken-in armchair in what seemed to vaguely pass for a living room, letting the dogs nap by his feet as he slowly turned the pages, looking back and forth between the prose and the clock, wondering if and when Will would reappear. This page in particular called forth a fresh gust of suspenseful aching inside him, as Hannibal remembered the intense development of his fixation on the remarkable, unpredictable and precious man he loved.

”She was still under the spell of her infatuation. She had tried to forget him, realizing the inutility of remembering. But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. It was not that she dwelt upon details of their acquaintance, or recalled in any special or peculiar way his personality; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing.”

He brushed a foolish tear away and swallowed hard, resolving to meet Will’s next move with dignity. “Don’t look at me like that,” he groused to Winston, who had been gazing up at him with big, sympathetic eyes.

He stuffed the book into the cushions and scrambled haphazardly to his feet when he heard the car pulling into the drive. There wasn’t quite enough time to wonder how Will had stolen

his ability to maintain his usually impeccable, prim decorum, only Will charging back inside and closing the door, only Hannibal's heart lodged suffocatingly in his throat.

"You're alone," Hannibal managed to blurt, not sure what to do with his hands, so he folded them in front of him but wound up fidgeting to an absurd extent one might call "wringing."

"She's perfectly comfortable, so I left her there for the time being, so that I could come back and deal with you," Will practically spat, tossing his coat on top of Hannibal's on the kitchen counter.

"Yes, I imagine she's quite cozy. Told me she planned to spend the holiday perfecting her mint chocolate chip cookies recipe, 'binging' classic Christmas movies and learning how to knit," Hannibal said with a smile that was ridiculously daring in the circumstances.

"Don't," Will warned, holding a hand out like a stop sign pointed at Hannibal's attempt at light conversation.

"You knew I would still be here."

"Yes. Why would you drop a bomb on me like that and disappear without getting to see the results of your curious gambit? Are you intrigued, Dr. Lecter, to see what I'll do next?"

Will stalked towards him, predator to prey, and all the blood in Hannibal's body rushed straight to his stiffening cock. "I'm always intrigued by you, Will."

"Why?" Will came so close that his breath tickled Hannibal's face, and Hannibal drew up his hands to rest them, trembles and clammy palms and all, on Will's shoulders.

"Because I love you."

No sooner had he spoken the words than Will drew back and smashed his fist into Hannibal's mouth, sending him staggering backwards.

"How dare you?" Will snarled, shaking out his hand while Hannibal patted blearily at a fresh spout of blood on his cheek. He realized he was sprawled out on the floor, having landed unceremoniously on his ass.

I should have led with 'I'm sorry.'

"You don't *love* me, you're not capable of that. I'm a toy to you, just a plaything for your amusement, and the moment I became a potential obstacle to your ongoing fun, you disposed of me accordingly." Will hovered over him, fuming and ready to lunge in another attack if Hannibal made a wrong move.

Hannibal lay there as obedient as a lamb, offering a gently penitent smile. "That's not true. I love you with all of my heart and soul, Will. You are the dream of my life. If you let me, I will spend the rest of mine proving how much your happiness means to me."

"*You framed me for murder*!" Will shouted in his face, but Hannibal didn't flinch, only nodded in resignation. "You killed…" Tears filled his eyes and he slapped Hannibal hard in

the face. “You killed my friend, you lied to me about Abigail.”

Hannibal's chest heaved, his ego and his patience straining with excruciating force against the pure depth of his love, the only thing that could shut them up. This was the real test, not to let the armor he’d crafted out of childhood trauma and a resolve never to be hurt again stop him from being open to Will.

“I was a fool,” he admitted, flushed with embarrassment at the self-abasement, the unfamiliar feelings completely overwhelming, as if he as repeatedly slapping himself in the face, much harder than Will had, and sans the accompanying sexual rush. He realized that what he was now doing was...unheard of: he was putting Will first. “All I can possibly do is say I’m sorry and beg for your forgiveness.”

“Oh, I beg to differ.” Will crossed his arms across his oatmeal-colored sweater. “That’s not all you can possibly do.”

He was out of his depth, lost in Will’s glacial stare. “If there’s something else that will appease you, you need only ask--”

Will planted his own phone on Hannibal’s chest and slammed his hand over it. The small, heavy weight of the phone crushed to his ribs, surely leaving a bruise on his skin as another thrill went through him at the pain, Will’s forcefulness, the cut of his voice-- “Call Jack Crawford right now. Confess to everything.”

“Will you forgive me?”

“No,” Will said with a pained smile, “But I will be *appeased.*”

Hannibal nodded, sitting up a little straighter, leveraging his back to the lower cabinets and licking his bloodied lip as he dialed Jack. The phone rang three times, understandable even for Jack, as it was mid-Christmas morning and some people *did* take at least one day off.

“This had better be good, Will,” Jack remarked wryly as he finally answered, Bella’s gentle voice in the background sounding merry.

Hannibal opened his mouth to confess to his far-reaching murderous bloodbath and hedonistic cannibal feasting, only for Will to snatch the phone back.

“Just called to say Merry Christmas,” he grumbled into the phone.

“Oh, okay, Merry--” Jack’s voice cut off as Will hung up and tossed the phone aside.

“Get up,” he said brusquely, nodding at Hannibal, who rose unsteadily, resting his hands on either side of him on the counter.

“When you said you loved me, what did you mean?” Will asked.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal and Will's reconciliation ended up being, *ahem*, quite a bit longer and more detailed than I expected, so there will now be four chapters. ;)

Baby, there's no better gift

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Pure empathy, Will,” Hannibal sighed, running a hand through his curls. So soft, as if they had been made to be stroked and played with by his hands. “You know the answer.”

Will brushed the errant lock of Hannibal’s own hair back from his brow so that their motions mirrored each other. Fascination glimmered across Will’s face, along with something else, a passionate tenderness which had been repressed in bitter denial. Tilting his face just so, Will leaned in and brushed a gentle, nervous, small kiss to Hannibal’s mouth, his lips warm and perfect. It was so startlingly easy for Will to fall back into vulnerability with Hannibal, but finally he knew that rather than a tool to twist Will's mind to his advantage, this vulnerability was a precious gift, one he was determined to honor.

Hannibal growled quietly, gripping Will’s waist and dragging him closer, fitting their mouths together for a deeper, hotter kiss, relishing the taste of Will’s moan echoing through him as their tongues met in a slippery velvet duet.

It was amazingly different from the dream, where everything between them had been based on Hannibal’s fantasies, his *expectation* of what this would feel like. In reality, Will was so much more, hot and solid, rocking his hips into Hannibal’s with more needy little moans, running his fingers through Hannibal’s hair and tugging, greedy, insatiable.

“*God,*” Will gasped when they parted for air, “If you only knew how much I wanted this. Almost from the beginning, how I wished you would...and then you…”

“I ruined it,” Hannibal allowed, breathing raggedly, cupping Will’s face in both hands, needing his full confession now, in return for his own. “I thought...you wanted Alana…”

“I thought that, too. Until the night I kissed her, and I drove an hour through the snow to tell you about it because you were the only one who would understand how I felt, that I was too much, too damaged and messy for anyone to love. In retrospect, kind of idiotic, for me not to have noticed you were the one I really wanted, but I refused to let it surface. Never thought of myself as gay, but more than that, even if I was...you were way out of my league, and then when I told you I kissed her…” Will had fallen into breathless babbling, emotion gushing in helpless torrents with the memories. “I saw the way you looked.”

“Jealous.” Hannibal smiled at the admission. What a jealous, torturously infatuated dunce he had been, thinking his only recourse was to send Will into the jaws of danger with Tobias. Blinding himself to the fact that losing Will would be synonymous to losing himself, and there was no amount of trickery that could make it otherwise.

“You were jealous, and that night I started to see you in a new way. I couldn’t unsee it. The attraction, it sparked something in me, to think that someone like you could want me,

knowing better than anyone how truly fucked up I was." Will shrugged, "Wouldn't have occurred to me before that, to think of you that way. To let myself."

"Someone like me?" Hannibal smiled, trailing his fingers down Will's spine, eliciting a shudder.

"Sophisticated, cultured. Snobby."

They both laughed, and Will elaborated, as Hannibal carefully removed his adorable glasses and set them aside, "Um, beautiful." He blushed. "Brilliant, someone who sees me. You were so cool and collected, but something was burning under the surface…" he ran his fingers over Hannibal's shirtfront. "For me."

"Yes, always. And only for you." Hannibal lowered his mouth to Will's lovely, pale neck and laid siege to it with wet, open-mouthed kisses, interspersed with bites as lavish as they were sharp.

"*Ahh!*" A helpless ache reverberated from Will's voice and his clutching fingers on Hannibal's elbows, holding on for dear life. Hannibal recognized the ache, couldn't even be sure it hadn't come from his own heart, it was that identical. Will tried to concentrate on continuing his narrative, husky and submissive: "I forgot what it felt like even to imagine wanting anyone else, and believe me, I tried to make myself remember, out of spite. I guess I know now...God!" Hannibal smirked against his neck. "I guess I know now why you dated Alana."

"To drive you crazy," he admitted before sucking a fresh bite mark hard. "Did it work?"

"Fuck! Yes," Will gritted out, fingers tight now in Hannibal's hair. "Don't ever do that to me again, make me so jealous thinking you've chosen someone else. I can't promise what I'll do."

Hannibal's heart skipped a beat, his cock thickening at the sound of Will's words. "Why?"

"I love you," Will muttered possessively, licking a line from Hannibal's chin to his mouth, savoring the friction of his slight five o'clock shadow before sucking Hannibal's lower lip, then biting it, *not* shyly. A warm trickle of blood flavored their next kiss. "You're mine."

Hannibal groped Will's ass, needing his clothes *off,* growling in heated frustration.

"I want to know how many different methods I can find to get you to make that noise," Will whispered, and in response Hannibal's hand shot out hungrily to Will's groin, palming his firmly bulging erection.

Will's eyes rolled up and his luscious lips parted around a desperate moan.

"Naughty boy," said Hannibal with a wicked grin, "I want you to moan for me all night long." He tugged Will's shirt out of his trousers, then hurriedly unbuttoned it, sighing in disbelief as he smoothed the shirt over Will's sculpted biceps and let it slide to the floor.

The devil's grin faded into a worshipful gaze as Hannibal slowly caressed Will's shoulders, then his arms, the softly firm flesh of his pectorals and across his rosy nipples until they hardened and Will's cheeks were a matching, deep shade of pink. "Please, please…"

"What do you want, Will?" Hannibal asked, planting a hand to his chest and walking him back to the bed. The dogs, mercifully, stayed snoozing in the corner.

Will fell back onto the bed, pulling Hannibal down on top of him. The cheap boxspring was already squeaking as they ground their clothed erections together with jagged groans, Will's legs wrapped tight around Hannibal, ankles hooked to press him even closer.

Hannibal couldn't seem to stop obsessively mouthing and biting at Will's throat, knowing the repetitious, insistent marking had to hurt by now, but Will melted at every single attention, nearly sobbing for more. Thank God, because Hannibal was addicted to claiming his sweet, delectable boy and wanted to see Will covered in teeth-tracks and hickeys from head to toe. His own lip and cheek throbbed, bound to be rendered bruised and more bloody than necessary as Will extended the ache of the wounds he had inflicted, and Hannibal grinned to think how like-minded they were about the fusion of pleasure and pain, how plainly they enjoyed marking each other.

"I'm sorry, this bed is terrible, I--" Will groaned in slight embarrassment as the mattress kept tilting, the entire bed seeming in constant threat of collapse under their fervently tangled weight.

"Shh, there's my shy boy again," Hannibal smiled, "As determined as I am to procure you a proper bed, or else insist you share my own because you deserve only the best--"

Will laughed and bucked his hips into him again, biting his lip as their cocks slid tantalizingly together, prompting them both to start fiddling with their pants' buttons, a tricky proposition since it required them to move slightly away from each other.

"Nonetheless, this bed has you in it, and today that's more than good enough. It's everything, Will. Because you are." He barely recognized the throaty way he spoke, every word laden with heartrending adoration, the knowledge that he'd never been this naked before, with or without clothes.

The bed was rickety though, shaking as Hannibal ripped Will's pants down, his lover lifting his hips to help, then shooting back up to eagerly pull Hannibal's own trousers down, both of them highly pleased at the pile of clothes accumulating on the floor beside the bed. They eyed each other's cocks pressing hard and impressive against their underwear, with damp, matching splotches of precum at the fronts.

"Jesus, Hannibal," Will sighed, whipping Hannibal's sweater off and coming to him, both of them on their knees, Will claiming Hannibal's mouth in a powerfully searching kiss that left them panting, lips red and swollen. They kept thrusting together, and Hannibal snuck his hand down the back of Will's briefs to squeeze each of his ass cheeks, then slide a finger teasingly between them, dancing around his hole before pressing against it, still dry, not penetrating, just leaving a *suggestion* there that made Will press his face to Hannibal's shoulder in elated, frenetic tension. "Yes, yes…"

“What…” Hannibal asked, sliding three fingers lazily inside Will’s mouth, groaning as Will fellated them wantonly. He pushed Will’s briefs down and smacked his ass before parting his cheeks to press one finger slowly inside his tight, hot hole. “What do you want, Will?”

“The same thing...I’ve always wanted...but denied us both until now. To have you,” Will breathed, fingers digging into Hannibal’s hips, “deep inside me-- oh, God!”

Hannibal added more saliva, then pressed a second thick finger inside Will and began thrusting with slow, firm insistence, seeking out his prostate as he licked Will’s earlobe and tickled his ear with the question, “You like being my good boy?”

“Fuck, I-- yes, but…” Will blushed even harder, a gorgeous sight Hannibal couldn’t have known was even possible. He buried his face further into the nook of Hannibal’s neck and shoulder, moaning self-consciously, “I feel silly about it...I’m t-too old to be called a b-- ohhhh...God, Hannibal, fuck…”

Hannibal smiled, on cloud nine as he added a third finger and targeted the swollen bulb of tissue inside Will that made him sink his teeth into Hannibal’s shoulder in helpless throes of pleasure.

“You should be proud,” Hannibal reassured him, pride filling his own heart until it overflowed. He reached down to stroke Will’s erection, still thrusting his fingers inside, faster now, and Will’s breaths were getting quick as well, rising in a clear rhythm to match the one Hannibal set.

“Proud to be daddy’s very good boy,” he elaborated, and Will gave a harsh jolt of surprise as Hannibal’s choice of words pushed him over the edge and he spurted hot white and plentiful, all over Hannibal’s hand and the bed.

“I didn’t mean to...come so soon,” Will sighed, falling back against the pillows with a look of total astonishment and slight regret on his face.

“I wanted you to. You deserved it,” Hannibal praised, “I’m sure I can resume your stimulation soon enough.” He used an almost clinical vocabulary to deliberately remind Will of their original roles in each others’ life, drawing on the taboo fact of a therapist doing these things with a patient. It was naughty and exceptionally delightful.

“You’re going to kill me.” Will rested the back of his hand to his sweaty brow and they both chuckled, matching dark humor sparked by the irony of the statement; matching joy that they knew it would never come true now. Hannibal wanted only one thing from Will, and that was to love him, to claim his love in return.

Will lifted his brows with a small, curious, tentative smile. “*Daddy*, by the way?”

His breath hitched as Hannibal lapped up the mess on his belly, then looked up at him most pleased and licked his lips.

“You seemed to like it in the moment,” Hannibal smirked.

“I might have to...work my way up...to actually saying that to you,” Will admitted. “God, you’re beautiful…” He raked his fingers through Hannibal’s chest hair and tweaked his nipples, delighting in the hectic, deep groans he provoked so easily.

“You may have noticed that I like you calling me ‘Doctor’ as well.” He lost his breath when Will climbed over him and slid his underwear off, causing his painfully engorged cock to spring free.

“Hmm. I *may* have fallen into the habit of taunting you with that, just to see if I could get a rise out of you,” Will grinned, laying a sloppy kiss on Hannibal’s mouth, then glancing down as Hannibal’s cock jerked slightly, untouched and crying out for that to change.

“Mission accomplished,” Will bragged, acting like such a filthy little brat that Hannibal pulled his hair roughly. “Oh -- I *like* that. I didn’t think I would like that. Maybe this is all part of my becoming. Is it a highly personalized continuation of my therapy, Dr. Lecter, showing me all the hidden proclivities I never knew I ached for?”

“What else do you like that you didn’t expect to?” Hannibal rasped as Will slid down his body and parted his thighs to ease his head down between them, licking all the way from his balls to the tip of his wet, reddened dick. “Will!” He squeezed his eyes shut, fingers clamped desperately to Will’s messed-up curls. “*Will.*”

“Yes, Doctor?” Will’s mischievous look prompted Hannibal to rake a hand roughly through his curls and pull hard, and he moaned, pressing Hannibal’s cock to his face, an act of blatant adoration. “I’m a little worried this might not be very good on my part.”

“Will, I assure you it will be much, much more than good.” He thrust his erection rhythmically against Will’s face until Will moaned and sucked the tip. After releasing a cavalcade of swearing in at least three languages, alternating between whispers and near-shouts, Hannibal elaborated, “The mere *idea* of you putting your mouth on me, or touching me there, I--”

He threw his head back and panted as Will licked and slurped up and down his length, then sucked him down as deeply as he could manage, the strokes of his soft, wet, warm tongue slow and languid, *savoring* so that his attitude was even more erotic to Hannibal than the act itself. With impeccable instinct, he sucked his cheeks tight, snugly enveloping Hannibal’s hot length while that big, heavy hand on his head guided his bobbing motion as much as the ragged pleas for more.

“Will,” he said hoarsely, “Come here.” Will released his cock with a moist pop, then climbed back up his body and looked down into his lust-blown amber eyes, letting Hannibal take in the sight of his reddened lips, chin coated in saliva and pre-cum.

Hannibal kissed him again as they ground together, his hands flying to Will’s ass, spreading pert cheeks and spanking, the kisses growing hotly desperate, patience completely disintegrating.

“Do you have any lubricant?” Hannibal asked between kisses, and Will’s hand shot out blindly for his bedside table drawer. “Let me,” Hannibal offered, and Will blushed again.

“I’ll get it, wait, Hannibal--” but it was too late.

Inside the drawer, Hannibal found not only a sizable and half-empty bottle of lube, but also an impressively large dildo. “Were you imagining me, Will, when you fucked yourself on that?” he asked breathlessly, and as they kissed again, both of them knew they were overdoing it so that their mouths would be sore for ages afterwards.

All Hannibal could do was keep kissing, thrilling at the snap of pain from the cut in his lip which Will seemed addicted to tugging, nipping, licking and sucking, all he could do was get his hands all over Will’s sweat-slicked and tensed body, lithe and muscled and soft and hard in all the right places, willing this not to be another dream, but it couldn’t be and he knew it. Every tiny sensation was too outstandingly real for that, including Will’s reversion to shyness, clinging to Hannibal’s shoulders and trying to hide from his incisive gaze.

“Yes, I thought of you, that’s why I bought it,” Will whispered, licking at Hannibal’s earlobe and then biting it before nosing along Hannibal’s neck and chin leaving kisses and nips everywhere his delicious stubble brushed. “I was mortified with myself for still wanting you, but imagining you was the only way I could get off. And I *needed* to, Hannibal. More than I ever had in my life before meeting you.”

“You need this,” Hannibal guessed, rubbing his cock between Will’s ass cheeks.

“So much,” Will breathed against his mouth, rolling onto his back and urging Hannibal on top of him, relishing the hard, hot weight of his body pinning him with ruthless plans to take everything he had to give. His pretty mouth trembled around his next words, released softly, bashfully. “So much, daddy.”

Hannibal would have loved to have taken this very slowly, enjoying every nuance of foreplay to the utmost, rendering Will a shivering, helpless mess beneath his mouth as he rimmed him, or with the two of them sixty-nining so that he could let Will fuck relentlessly into his mouth and wreck his eager throat. But Will’s words, the complete beauty of everything about this moment of surrender, made further delay impossible, inadmissible. He reminded himself that they had the rest of their lives to explore each other in more languid detail, and he felt a fresh burst of bliss when he realized he actually believed that was true.

“I just want what’s mine,” Will begged, closing his eyes to drive Hannibal wild with the sight of those long, silky lashes fluttering, and then the sound of Will as Hannibal pressed slowly inside his exquisite body was so much more profane than what they were doing could ever be. He moaned, raw and needy, as if he were being pulled apart at the seams.

There were no words for beauty on this level; Will was unfathomable, more than the loveliest painting or musical composition he had ever admired, beyond any artist’s skill with a brush or a pluck of a string to capture. But Hannibal could capture him; Will belonged to him now.

Hannibal rested his forehead against Will’s and then kissed his feverish brow with soothing affection as his heart ached, throbbing in time with the ecstatic pulsing of his cock gliding in deeper, then deeper until their hips met and they were finally one, the way it was always meant to be.

“I’m all yours, Will.” Hannibal met Will’s eyes as his lover opened his own and nodded.

“Yes, daddy.”

It was too much; Will was somehow (somehow!) endearingly innocent and devilishly manipulative at the same time, knowing just how to combine the two qualities to push Hannibal to distraction.

“Good boy,” he praised, then pounded into him for all he was worth with no warning, only a clear answer to what Will obviously wanted, and he drank up every one of Will’s wanton cries of “yes! God, more, harder! Fuck me, daddy,” for they were the sweetest, most life-restoring elixer his soul had ever found.

Will’s legs were shaking hard in an attempt to wrap around and keep Hannibal close, deep, and Hannibal smiled indulgently, lifting up to place one of those lovely legs over his own shoulder, finding that the new position afforded everything they needed in this moment of profound belonging: he could keep Will secure and soothed while thrusting in almost impossibly deep, and he could lean in to kiss Will as desperately as if it was the first time instead of seeming already like the hundredth.

The only difference was the kisses dissolving into untargeted, sloppy worship, Hannibal happy with any swath of Will’s skin his lips and tongue could latch onto -- his lips, his tongue, his cheeks, his chin, his neck -- he was lost in Will’s scent. It was a mixture of salty-sharp, joyous desire, sweat and that obnoxious aftershave which he secretly loved. He was lost in the feel of Will’s body squeezing around him, tight, hot and satiny, like being inside happiness itself, because he was. Lost in Will’s moans and whimpers, the harsh snap of hips and the increasingly loud slap of skin to skin, and he was losing control of the tempo he had set for this, he was falling apart and he needed Will to go with him.

“Touch yourself, baby,” he said thickly, and Will’s answering sigh came even more from the pet name than the continued, delirious push and pull of their bodies. “Come for daddy.”

Will gripped his own cock with as much concentration as he could muster, trembling as Hannibal slammed in and hit his prostate again and again, sending waves of pleasure through him to make it easy to coax himself all the way, just a few quick strokes and he was exploding again as Hannibal did the same deep inside him, setting off a sensation of wetness and a new lubrication to ease the glide while Hannibal fucked him through both of their orgasms. Finally, they lay there still joined but spent and speechless, only managing ragged breaths and to hold each other close, hearts hammering.

“Merry Christmas,” Will grinned some time later, playing with Hannibal’s hair as Hannibal rested his head on Will’s chest, having wrapped himself possessively around Will to reassure himself they were really together now and they always could be. If anyone tried to drive them apart ever again, he would tear them limb from limb. He and Will would feast upon their remains in triumphant continuation of their perfect union. “I think we broke the bed, by the way, but I didn’t even feel it.”

“Nor I,” Hannibal answered, finally noticing that the bed did now seem to be situated directly on the floor. Somewhere in the blurry distance during their lovemaking, he thought he had

heard the dogs barking in irritation at the noise, but they must have gone back to sleep because all was quiet now.

“Not something I usually bother saying,” Hannibal admitted, kissing Will’s chest, “But Merry Christmas, Will. This time, I really mean it. It...feels like Christmas. You do. I suppose that is unforgivably cliche of me to say.”

“Who’s blushing now?” Will asked fondly. “I’m glad you finally got into the spirit, and I have to admit...I’m pleased enough right now that all those cheesy couples traditions about the holidays actually sound *appealing* to me.” He wrinkled his nose, clearly recognizing he was quickly becoming one of *those* boyfriends. “Want to go for a carriage ride in the snow, cuddled up under a blanket with you, drinking hot cocoa while the snow drifts lazily and fluffily down on us, and all that sappy, played-out nonsense. Cliche enough?”

Hannibal didn’t have to look up to know Will had on that amusedly mischievous smile he wore when he was both teasing and serious, so he just snuggled even closer into Will’s body heat and hummed contentedly. “Not nearly. I think we should go out tomorrow and buy our first Christmas tree as a couple, then --”

“Then buy a few zillion ornaments, seeing as neither one of us actually have any?” Will laughed, massaging Hannibal’s shoulders and back now, his fingers firm, the pressure heavenly. “As a bonus, everything is on clearance now.” He paused, deep in thought. “What about Abigail?”

“In a few days, I want you to come away with me, Will. With us. I want the three of us to start again, a new life together far from here and anyone who would try to stop us. It’s what I always wanted, only I thought I had to get it by scheming and tricking you into wanting the same.”

“Idiot,” Will groaned. “All you had to do was ask.”

“Mischa told me that, in my dream. I shudder to think what further errors I might have stumbled into had she not guided me into this Christmas miracle.”

“It’s not a *miracle* that I should want you, Hannibal.” Will trailed lazy nails down his back, pouring honey over every word. “I can’t breathe without doing that, too.”

“Are you still angry with me?”

Hannibal turned around and settled on his back to look up at him and they slowly traced each others’ lips, mesmerized.

“Yes,” Will decided, “I can feel the anger still rattling around me somewhere, slightly muffled by everything else you make me feel, you evil bastard. I expect that will last for a while. But I will still run away with you. I still want to be with you, and for us to be a family. I guess we might have to live in hiding, hmm? Like in your dream?”

“Have you apprised Jack Crawford of your suspicions as to my crimes, and have you been colluding with him to trick me into a confession?”

“Uh-huh. He’ll know exactly what’s going on once he realizes we’re gone, or at least, he’ll guess enough of it. But you’re not on any watchlists yet, and there’s no reason we should have a problem slipping away as long as we’re reasonably well-disguised. Are you angry with me, for the apprising and the colluding?”

Hannibal shrugged. “I nursed the suspicion in anger for some time, but now I can see the folly of me resenting your attempted vengeance. I would be short-sighted to think you would just abandon your tirade of violence against me after your original attempt to have me killed was a failure.”

“It had a lot more to do with justice than revenge,” Will asserted, doubt flitting across his eyes. Even as he spoke the words they were hollow in their deception.

“Who are you kidding, Will?”

“Guess I could never fool you for long,” Will sighed, “You see right through me.”

“Your darker motivations are a continual source of arousal and delight to me, which helps in my ability to absolve you from your planned betrayal. And while I do possess keen insight into your nature, I genuinely had no idea you reciprocated my feelings until Mischa told me as much.”

“You realize that makes no sense?” Professor Graham was back, analyzing his lover. “Mischa, in the dream, was a product of your own subconscious. That means you *did* know how I felt, but you just wouldn’t let the realization reach the surface level of your thinking. You goaded yourself into it.”

Hannibal shook his head. “I don’t believe my dream was that simple. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, a true crossroads. I felt Mischa’s hand in it as surely as if she had been there in spirit, guiding me. I regard the dream as one part my own mind’s conjuring, the other her design. She asked me to consider what a life with you would be, and more than that, what I must do to make it possible. I found that my imagining of it was vivid, too perfect to be real but nearly tangible. Much like this very moment, Will, but I can still taste you, and I know this time it *is* real, undeserved perfection and all.” A husky laugh accompanied his last statement and he ducked his chin, shy as Will had ever been.

“It’s real,” Will smiled, tipping Hannibal’s face back up to meet his eyes, shining with affection. “But I’m still struggling to believe how idealistic and optimistic you suddenly seem. There’s always been sort of a cheerful, plucky brightness about your dealings with me, even at their most deranged, but also always with a sidecar of your natural assumption you would lose me. Lose me by your own hand or machinations, maybe, to avoid losing me because I wouldn’t want to be with you. Now you’re telling me the magic of Christmas and the ghost of your sister facilitated this chance for us to reconcile? What’s next, are you going to run through the streets crying ‘Merry Christmas, God bless us one and all?’”

“Firstly, that is *not* what my accent sounds like,” Hannibal chortled.

“Yes, it *is*,” Will whispered, laughing, then smacking a big kiss onto Hannibal’s sculpted cheekbone.

“And my mood prior to dreaming of a life with you was very different, Will. I assure you that ‘bah humbug’ would have been far too kind a phrase to describe my sentiment.”

Will’s smile faded only slightly as his pondering mode returned: “One thing bewilders me a little, in the dream you said we had been on the lam maybe about a year, but we weren’t even engaged?”

“Not even my subconscious is that egotistical, Will. To imagine you would actually give me your hand in marriage...it is more than I could hope, even in my wildest dreams.”

“Maybe just ask me someday and you’ll find out.” Will squirmed out of Hannibal’s arms, but he did it playfully, with a bubbly laugh that lifted Hannibal’s thundering heart in a haze of unheard of bliss. “I’m going to shower, and then I want to get right back to snuggling you for the remainder of the holiday season, and then we can plan our escape, maybe *sometime* after negotiating the terms of our relationship and making sure Abigail actually wants to go with us. It will be her choice, or you can forget the whole deal,” he warned.

“I’m fine with that,” Hannibal agreed. “What good did it ever do me to try and trick either of you onto a path of my choosing? You are each far too clever for that.”

He’d finally admitted to being wrong enough times that the act was starting to feel less like a humiliating self-abasement and more like his own becoming into redemption. He would always be a killer; he could not change that anymore than he could alter his DNA, but he was capable of growth in directions he had once found abhorrent. Now it felt like coming alive after years festering in underground shadows, secretly yearning for worthy companionship, for belonging.

“He’s learning,” Will laughed softly, disappearing into the bathroom.

Hannibal fed the dogs, and soon enough Will reemerged in another of the plain white t-shirts and plaid boxers of which he had countless stacks in his dresser. He strode casually to Hannibal as if his presence here was already a foregone conclusion and kissed his cheek before slapping his ass.

As Hannibal watched him in speechlessly besotted wonder, Will ambled to the couch and flipped the tv on, pulling a faded blue blanket over his legs.

The hearty dose of domesticity tugged rough on something deep in Hannibal’s heart. His cheeks flushed and he didn’t dare break the precious silence of comfort between them; instead he took a quick shower, then returned to the kitchen to prepare them a simple breakfast, wearing another set of Will's underthings. The t-shirt clung to his broader chest and rode up his low belly slightly, the boxers adhering snugly to his behind in a way that made Will sit up and take highly appreciative notice.

“Mmm,” Will enthused, famished but taking the time to enjoy each bite of the warm, exceptionally cheesy egg and ham sandwich. Hannibal sat primly beside him and ate his own meal, prompting Will to nudge his ass fondly with one foot before settling his legs across his lover’s lap. “And you’re even letting me eat on the couch.”

“Yes,” Hannibal allowed, sipping his orange juice with a sly glance in Will’s direction. “Anything today, for my very good boy.”

“Promise I won’t make a mess, daddy. Mainly because I’m too tired by now to provoke you.”

“Good. Provoke me later.” Hannibal set his dish aside as Will quieted, nuzzling into a throw pillow and watching the early afternoon broadcast of *It’s a Wonderful Life* with a demeanor Hannibal had never yet seen on him: he might actually call it “calm.”

Perhaps it was because he had never seen Will in the fog looking back at his floating house and feeling safe; perhaps it was because he had never accompanied Will on a fishing trip, but Hannibal knew this was the first time he had enjoyed the sight of Will sated, content and unfearful, and it was here with him.

“Ha, I love this part,” Will admitted, and the weight of his legs and feet atop Hannibal’s lap was the sweetest, warmest, nicest thing Hannibal could imagine at that moment. He massaged Will’s calves, ankles and feet, and Will smiled, his eyes drifting shut. “Don’t tell anyone I’m such a sentimental sap.”

“I won’t,” Hannibal vowed, and he settled in to watch the film as well, George Bailey promising to lasso the moon for Mary as they threw rocks through the old house that would someday be their home.

Promises made with reckless unconcern for practicality, accumulating broken glass and embedding themselves deep inside the hearts of dreaming lovers. A sweet and life-affirming pain. He understood the mood well enough, with the first and last dream of his life right there beside him, melting under his touch into a gentle, well-deserved slumber at last.

“Wanted to stay up and talk with you about everything...so many plans and...but I’m *tired*,” Will muttered, emitting a long snore mere seconds later as Hannibal chuckled.

“Just sleep for now, baby,” Hannibal soothed, “I’ll be here waiting when you wake."

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 3 title comes from Robbie Williams' song "Time for Change" and Chapter 4 title from Little Mix's song "One I've Been Missing." Thank you for reading, hope you enjoyed it! <3

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